

Customer Engagement Strategy

Introduction

This strategy sets out our approach and commitment to customer engagement and involvement and is aligned to our business plan. This is a strategy for one year and delivery of our strategic aims will ensure we are in a strong position to meet proposed regulatory changes as set out in the Social Housing White Paper, adopt good practice and more importantly ensure we incorporate the customer voice in everything we do.

During this year we will see further change and more detail on increased regulatory expectations that we will incorporate into our further work to engage with customers and staff to co create a longer term strategy that will bring assurance and positive outcomes for years ahead.

It is the role of everyone at BCHA to ensure that this strategy is delivered, more importantly for the board to ensure our strategic obligations are implemented and to provide leadership and challenge to support its delivery. There is an action plan as part of this strategy to enable delivery of each of the objectives set out below.

Context

Over the past year the sector has faced unprecedented challenges including the pandemic impacting on staff, customers and services. More important is the publication of The Charter for Social Housing Residents; the White Paper sets out changes to how social housing is going to be regulated, more importantly we will see more proactive regulation of the consumer standards including the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

BCHA have already started work on responding to these challenges through engagement and have adopted some innovative approaches including improving our website, Staff2Customer and Customer Pulse surveys. Our current position is that we offer all our customers a range of opportunities to be involved and offer their input into BCHA services. Particularly our strength has been delivering engagement activities that boost mental health and wellbeing; we have also been working to develop a customer panel and youth forum. Building on the board report of October 2020, a strong and robust approach to customer engagement directly mitigates the risk to our customer satisfaction regarding the services delivered by BCHA and is of paramount importance to us and is embedded in the new 5-year business plan. We have made significant progress in developing service standards to incorporate customer voice. Without this, we not only risk poor relationships with customers, low staff motivation, negative publicity, and loss of goodwill in the community where we have properties but also potential regulator penalties.

A strategic engagement framework is critical for creating a strong, efficient, reputable and responsive organisation. We want to be able to improve our ability to evidence engagement further by embedding engagement across our services, evidencing

customer voice and influence; develop a culture of co-production and ensure we are meeting the regulatory standards.

Future Consumer Regulation

The Social Housing White Paper sets out seven themes that highlight increased expectations for landlords and proactive regulation through potentially new consumer standards and inspections. Those relevant to this strategy are summarised below;

1. To be safe in your home;
 - a. Landlords will need to support engagement with residents in all tenures on safety issues
2. To know how your landlord is performing
 - a. In time the RSH will bring in a set of tenant satisfaction measures for all landlords on 'things that matter to tenants'
 - b. Access to information scheme for social housing tenants
 - c. Requirement for a clear breakdown of spending
 - d. Requirement for a senior person in their organisation to be responsible for compliance against the consumer standards
 - e. Requirement to report to every tenant on the above at least once a year.
3. To have your complaints dealt with fairly and promptly
 - a. Legislative changes to enable stronger Housing Ombudsman powers including closer relationship with the RSH
4. To be treated with respect
 - a. Proactive regulation against the consumer standards with the RSH given greater powers for enforcement
 - b. A review of the consumer standards and potentially a code of practice
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord
 - a. Landlords to seek out good practice and continuously improve how they engage with tenants
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
 - a. Focus on how well housing staff are equipped to work with people with mental health needs
 - b. A requirement for a policy on domestic abuse
7. To be supported to take your first step to home ownership.

Further Assurance frameworks

The objectives set out in this strategy will ensure we have a roadmap to meet the commitments in the National Housing Federation Together with Tenants Charter. The strategy is also aligned with Tpas National Tenant Engagement Standards 2021. Self-assessment against these standards, in partnership with our customers, will enable us to demonstrate our commitment and compliance.

Tpas National Engagement Standards

Just published, the standards offer a blueprint for how an organisation could approach their engagement activity effectively. The principles underpinning the Standards help identify and create common and achievable goals that customers, landlords and contractors can work towards.

The Standards outline meaningful and flexible engagement principles that are proven to drive business improvement and community development. BCHA are members of Tpas and staff and customers can all access and enjoy member benefits.

Together with Tenants

Together with Tenants is a sector wide National Housing Federation (NHF) initiative aimed at strengthening the relationship between customers and their landlord. The Charter is part of a four-point plan, which also includes;

- An updated NHF Code of Governance and a requirement for boards to be accountable to their customers.
- Customer oversight and reporting against the charter
- Giving customers a stronger collective voice with regulator.



BCHA adoption of the Together with Tenants Charter is included in our strategic objectives and action plan.



Housing associations that adopt the Together with Tenants charter are making six commitments:

1. **Relationships:** Housing associations will treat all residents with respect in all of their interactions. Relationships between residents and housing associations will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.
2. **Communication:** Residents will receive clear, accessible and timely information from their housing association on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community, how the organisation is working to address problems, how the organisation is run, and information about performance on key issues.
3. **Voice and influence:** Housing associations will seek and value the views of residents, and will use this information to inform decisions. Every individual resident will feel listened to by their housing association on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.
4. **Accountability:** Collectively, residents will work in partnership with their housing association to independently scrutinise and hold their housing association to account for the decisions that affect the quality of their homes and services.
5. **Quality:** Residents can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.
6. **When things go wrong:** Residents will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress. Residents will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

The right Culture

Although there are clear standards and expectations to meet, it is the behaviours and attitudes supported by effective processes, which run through an organisation that set the foundation for positive outcomes to take place. Without the right culture, meeting standards on a consistent and continuous basis is challenging.

Tpas National Engagement Standards define this in more detail:

- A positive culture starts with the recognition of a mutually agreed role that shows the part customers can play in the governance of the organisation.
- True transparency and unhindered information sharing increases trust and builds relationships between customers and landlords.
- Continuous listening and learning allows organisations to respond positively to the environment and the changing needs of its customers.
- Meeting the diverse needs of customers, removing barriers to engagement and providing information in plain language is non-negotiable.
- Providing a range of opportunities to engage, with appropriate support systems can produce more meaningful outcomes.
- The acknowledgment and support for community- led solutions are a vital part of building local confidence and wider engagement opportunities.

In its 2018 – 19 Consumer Regulation review the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) stated ‘how registered providers engage with their residents is often indicative of its culture and the quality of the governance.’ Fiona McGregor also reiterated this stated in a Q&A session in January. This statement should be seen as a clear sign of intent from the RSH as to what the future holds in the proposed inspection and regulatory regime. This gives sufficient warning that failing to meet the consumer standards could negatively affect a governance regulatory rating. The spirit of the comment is relevant when considering the effectiveness of any organisation in hearing the voice of the customer.

We set out our cultural principles within our Risk Management Policy, these are also key drivers for colleagues across our organisation. This strategy encapsulates these principles across delivery of our four priorities;

- Honesty, openness and ownership
- Innovation and learning from experience
- Collaboration to drive performance, manage risk and achieve success
- Compassion, care and responsive service to our customers
- Being an employer of choice
- Delivering value for money for our customers, funders and the wider society
- Championing social and environmental issues of relevance to our work
- Compliance with the law and regulatory obligations

Accountability

A key outcome from the ‘Social Housing White Paper – a Charter for social housing (2020)’ was for organisations to consider how their engagement framework supports them to be open, transparent and accountable. In particular, being able to evidence and demonstrate how customers had been listened to and their issues acted upon.

Accountability models should include Boards, governance structures and senior managers being able to identify and evidence how customer ‘voices’ have been able to influence, challenge and make changes to service areas, service standards, customer promises and communication more generally.

Customer input into this strategy

We have worked with some of our customers to seek views and in summary key feedback is set out below.

Our Staff2Tenant Survey reported in April 2020 that 41% of SH and 59% of GN tenants said yes or maybe to being more involved in the future. This strategy will build on this appetite for our tenants to be more involved.

What customers who have been involved say...

“I have been working on this engagement strategy with BCHA and it feels good to be listened to and create something that means something to tenants”

“I am part of the Tenant panel and at first I thought no one would take my ideas seriously, but they do”

“BCHA is our organisation so I want a say in how it’s managed, I am excited about next year as I have volunteered to be involved”

“I am a sceptic but what I have seen so far is hopeful”

Tenant Engagement Strategic Objectives

BCHA vision for tenant engagement

“Working together to ensure tenant voices are embedded in influencing services and decision-making bringing service improvements and greater value for money.”

The BCHA corporate vision is ‘Working Together’ to build;

- Better homes
- Better lives
- Better communities

This Customer Engagement Strategy will support each of our strategic commitments as set out in our **Collaborating to Inspire Change** business plan 2020-2025, with direct links to;

Customer focus goal 1: Developing an accessible digital customer portal

Customer focus goal 2: Developing and inspiring change

Customer focus goal 3: Becoming a landlord of choice

Working together goal 7: Working as agile teams

Working together goal 8: Raising our profile to influence

Growth goal 11: Providing support around health, wellbeing and skills.

This strategy compliments and will enhance our work to date on service standards as part of our **Landlord of Choice** Customer Focus goal and our work to develop service standards to reach this underpins our journey to meet greater public and political focus on performance of social landlords.

As part of our four Customer engagement objectives we are seeking to contribute to;

- **Clarify what makes a “good landlord’ and become accountable to customers on these principles**
- **Staff appreciate they must make every contact with customers count**
- **Staff offer choices to customers wherever possible and view the customer as a “whole person” in providing services.**

We have made significant progress in developing service standards for;

- **Asset and Compliance**
- **Customer Engagement**
- **Customer Services**
- **Dealing with ASB**
- **Repairs**
- **Housing Management.**

BCHA values and expected behaviours

This strategy reflects and supports our values as set out in our business plan as:

1. Personal integrity
2. The importance of every individual
3. Outstanding service to people
4. The importance of working together
5. Professional competence

Also set out above, this strategy also reflects our cultural behaviours as set out in our business plan as our:

1. Honesty, openness and ownership
2. Innovation and learning from experience
3. Collaboration to drive performance, manage risk and achieve success
4. Compassion, care and responsive service to our customers
5. Being an employer of choice
6. Delivering value for money for our customers, funders and the wider society
7. Championing social and environmental issues of relevance to our work
8. Compliance with the law and regulatory obligations.

BCHA Strategic objectives for Customer Engagement

“Working together with our customers to ensure they have a clear voice in our organisation by embedding engagement across our services, evidencing customer voice and influence and develop a culture of co-production while also ensuring we are meeting the regulatory standards.”

We will deliver the aims of this strategy through four clear priorities, within which there are a number of objectives. Our Customer Engagement Action Plan 2021-2022 and is at Annex 1)

What we will do

1. Work together to embed customer engagement across our services.

How we will do this

- Ensure customer involvement inductions are carried out for all new staff
- Ensure all staff are clear of the purpose and outcomes of all engagement activities through staff newsletters, training and briefings
- Ensure staff reviews incorporate a customer involvement target and measures progress and performance
- Continue to improve our complaints service and publish our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman code, review this with a panel of customers who will also work with us to review and continuously learn from complaints.

What we will do

2. Work together to evidence customer voice and influence across our services

How we will do this

- Review and develop our approach and engagement activities to ensure customers have opportunities to give feedback, influence services and decision-making
- Be clear on what engagement activities are available with explanations of time and influence by developing a menu of involvement that reflects our diverse communities
- Explore and understand the barriers to engagement and work to remove them
- Review our incentives for engagement, particularly focusing on recognition and reimbursement for key activities such as a prize draw
- Review our current approach to scrutiny to ensure our approach has clear routes to governance, business and service delivery promoting accountability
- Review our Terms of reference against good practice and ensure customers have a say in the final version
- Recruit customers to be able to support our approach and activities and offer good training and support opportunities to empower customers and build skills and confidence
- Offer training and support to our scrutiny group so they can carry out evidence based reviews and recommendations for improvements
- Enable and develop customers to be able to scrutinise our performance and hold us to account.
- Ensure all Board reports have reference to how customer voices were used as part of improvements to services, processes.
- Ensure the Board leads our strategic approach to customer engagement and challenges us to drive continuous improvement.

What we will do

3. Work together to develop a culture of co –production across our services

How we will do this

- Embed co creation as a whole organisation approach for staff teams to work with customers to design and deliver services at every level. All staff creating their own involvement initiatives and service review programme in partnership with customers
- Ensure service teams are able to involve customers for all service reviews including strategy and policy development recording changes and improvements that demonstrate how feedback has improved services or made other impacts
- Ensure opportunities and activities to enable customers to monitor service improvement action plans by sharing publically and inviting feedback
- Ensure all service areas support and value scrutiny, each review includes staff support from the service area to provide information and support
- Continue to consult and involve customers this year in the co creation of our next engagement strategy to include the best way to involve customers in our governance, monitoring and scrutiny of the housing management service, then again every three years.
- Community investment activities support partnership working and opportunities to increase understanding of customer and community priorities.

What we will do

4. Work together to ensure we meet regulatory standards

How we will do this

- Formally adopt the NHF Together with Tenants Charter
- Establish a staff and customer steering group to record evidence on meeting the charter commitments and reporting on progress to all staff and customers
- Ensure we engage with customers on all safety matters and provide assurance to customers about how we keep them safe in their homes and a lead for this from within our organisation
- Improve our information available to customers including;
 - How views have been considered in all engagement activities
 - KPIs and updates
 - Insight and how we are using it from our surveys Staff2Customers and Pulse
 - Performance against our engagement strategy action plan
- Provide clear information on key staff, roles and the named person for ensuing BCHA meets economic and consumer standards and links to what these are
- Engage Customers in our annual reporting ensuring we feedback to all customers key performance indicators, performance against our strategy, how income is being spent, complaint trends
- Review annually in partnership with customers the impact from engagement activities, taking into account diversity.
- Consider Tpas National Engagement Standards accreditation

How we will measure and monitor our success

We have created a dedicated action plan to accompany this strategy, this will focus on our four key engagement priorities set out above across a number of objectives that will ensure we;

- Achieve better outcomes for our customers, measured by our surveys on quality and efficiency
- Improve customer satisfaction rates across our services
- Achieve good external stakeholder feedback
- Are compliant with regulatory expectations
- Improve staff satisfaction and retention
- Evidence co-creation and co-production across all services
- Improve services

We will monitor our activity through recording hours' customer dedicate to working with us, records of activities and number of activities but also capture outcomes and impact made through our engagement through feedback from our customers about the difference made.

Barriers to engagement

BCHA has a diverse range of approximately 1400 homes across the South and South West. A number of these homes are supported homes for people who find themselves homeless after facing relationship breakdowns, addictions, unemployment, domestic violence and deteriorating mental and physical health. Potentially barriers to engagement as well as lack of time and perceived lack of influence will be identified and addressed through delivery of our action plan in particular our regular review of the impact of activities. As we deliver our actions within this strategy we will measure the diversity of those we engage with and target hard to reach groups within our future activities to ensure that we are engaging and involving in an accessible and inclusive way. We will ensure that the feedback we receive reflects the diverse communities in which we operate.